



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Howard County Police launch body camera pilot program *Ten officers will test various cameras for 45 days*

After months of research and policy development, the Howard County Police Department is announcing the launch of a body camera pilot program July 14. Ten officers who completed training in the last week will wear the cameras during two 45-day test periods and report back on their experiences and feedback from the public.

Last year, a work group was created by Police Chief Gary Gardner and County Executive Allan H. Kittleman to examine the technology, cost, usefulness, transparency, training, accountability and privacy issues in launching a body camera pilot.

“It was important for us to research this technology, which is changing all the time, and assess how it might be applied in Howard County,” said Chief Gardner. “The committee spent many months looking at other agencies’ programs and policies to ensure our pilot would include the best possible practices.”

The body camera work group interviewed five vendors and attended presentations on various body camera technologies. Committee members visited other agencies to view their body camera programs, and attended training conferences on the technology. They also drafted a temporary HCPD policy for the pilot program, and met with local stakeholders, including prosecutors, public defenders, community groups and the county’s hospital and school system, for input.

At the end of 2016, the committee voted to test two vendors for the pilot, Axon, formerly known as Taser, and Utility. Since then, the police department has been negotiating vendor agreements, establishing training guidelines and acquiring the necessary equipment. During the pilot, the same ten officers will test cameras from both vendors during two, back-to-back test periods. The officers will try different styles of cameras, including one that can be attached to a hat or glasses, and others that are worn on the front of the uniform shirt. The vendors are offering free trial programs for the duration of the pilot.

“Our police department has been thorough, strategic and diligent in its preparation for a body camera pilot program,” said County Executive Allan H. Kittleman. “Now that the pilot is underway, I look forward to the committee’s findings and recommendations at the conclusion of the test period to determine where we go from here.”

The HCPD has contracted with a consultant from Loyola University to conduct a study of the pilot program. He will assist in capturing data and aid the committee in making recommendations at the conclusion of the pilot to determine if Howard County will move forward with a more permanent body camera program.

“Our goal is to explore the potential for use of this technology in Howard County and to assess its value as a law enforcement tool for officers and residents,” said Chief Gardner.

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